United Nations A/C.4/56/SR.8

General Assembly
Fifty-sixth session

Official Records

Distr.: General
6 December 2001
English
Original: French

Special Political and Decolonization Committee (Fourth Committee)

Summary record of the 8th meeting
Held at Headquarters, New York, on Wednesday, 17 October 2001, at 3 p.m.

Chairman: Mr. Hasmy ..... (Malaysia)

Contents

Agenda item 85: Effects of atomic radiation

This record is subject to correction. Corrections should be sent under the signature of a member of the delegation concerned *within one week of the date of publication* to the Chief of the Official Records Editing Section, room DC2-750, 2 United Nations Plaza, and incorporated in a copy of the record.

Corrections will be issued after the end of the session, in a separate corrigendum for each Committee.

01-58488 (E)

The meeting was called to order at 3.15 p.m.

Agenda item 85: Effects of atomic radiation (A/56/46, with scientific annex, and A/C.4/56/L.5)

1. **Ms. Wilkinson** (Secretary of the Committee) said that the footnote on the first page of draft resolution A/C.4/56/L.5 should read: "See *Official Records of the General Assembly, Fifty-fifth Session, Supplement No. 49* (A/55/49), vol.I". Also, in the preambular part, the footnote reference should be placed after the phrase "of 8 December 2000".

2. **Mr. Cordeiro** (Brazil), introducing the report on the work of the United Nations Scientific Committee on the Effects of Atomic Radiation at its fiftieth session (A/56/46), in his capacity as Chairman of the Scientific Committee, said that the Committee made an important contribution to evaluating the effects of radiation on populations and the environment at the regional and global levels. The 2001 report examined the hereditary effects of ionizing radiation and included an evaluation of multifactorial diseases, such as diabetes and hypertension. The Committee's task was to disseminate information to researchers around the world and to provide scientific assistance to countries suffering from the effects of ionizing radiation. Its reports served as a basis for the drawing up of national and international standards for protection against the effects of ionizing radiation. Since the establishment of the Committee in 1955, the sources of atomic radiation had multiplied and many radionuclides were being released into the environment by nuclear power plants and as a result of their use in medicine, agriculture and industry. There was also a growing awareness of the existence of natural radiation sources. The complexity of the issues discussed by the Scientific Committee made it necessary to raise the level of public awareness about the effects of atomic radiation and to continue the search for rapid and viable solutions.

3. He wished to introduce draft resolution A/C.4/56/L.5 and to announce that France, India and Ireland had joined the list of co-sponsors. He hoped that the draft resolution would be adopted by consensus, as in previous years.

General debate

4. **Mr. De Loecker** (Belgium), speaking on behalf of the European Union, the associated countries Bulgaria, Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia and Turkey, and, in addition, Norway, said that the work of the United Nations Scientific Committee on the Effects of Atomic Radiation was authoritative and was generally used as a basis for drafting national and international standards to protect populations against the effects of atomic radiation. He welcomed the publication of the report of the Scientific Committee on the hereditary effects of atomic radiation, which was a very important addition to the previous year's report that had evaluated the risk from direct exposure to radiation. The 2001 report showed that hereditary risks were much lower than the risk of fatal cancer following direct exposure to radiation. The European Union supported the programme of work that had been adopted by the Scientific Committee, particularly the studies on the health effects of the Chernobyl accident, which should be published in 2005. It also welcomed and encouraged the cooperation between the Committee and the World Health Organization, the International Atomic Energy Agency, the International Commission on Radiological Protection and the International Commission on Radiation Units and Measurements.

5. **Mr. Datsenko** (Ukraine) welcomed the report of the Scientific Committee and the scientific annex thereto concerning the hereditary risks of radiation. His delegation attached particular importance to the study of the effects of radiation, particularly in view of the nuclear disaster at Chernobyl 15 years earlier. The Government of Ukraine was taking consistent steps towards mitigating the consequences of that disaster. In order to fulfil its international commitments and to strengthen the global nuclear safety regime, it had decided to close the Chernobyl nuclear plant on 15 December 2000, despite the economic and social constraints.

6. His delegation noted with satisfaction the submission by the Scientific Committee of its programme of work and supported the activities designed to discover more about the medical, social, psychological and environmental consequences of the Chernobyl disaster. It was important for the Scientific Committee to strengthen its collaboration with scientists from interested Member States. Ukrainian scientists would continue to cooperate with the Scientific Committee on issues such as the effects of low radiation doses on biological species and ecosystems, dynamic changes in health records and the

epidemiology of cancerous tumours and leukaemia in affected adults and children. Careful studies of the reliability of the Chernobyl Exclusion Zone would also be made with a view to assessing the need for additional safety measures.

7. The membership of the Scientific Committee had risen from 15, when it had been established in 1955, to its current level of 21, while the membership of the United Nations had risen from an original 76 to 189. He therefore urged the Special Political and Decolonization Committee to consider increasing the membership of the Scientific Committee. His country had the capacity to make a valuable contribution to the work of the Scientific Committee, given the considerable experience it had acquired in the area of radiation research.

8. **Mr. Ling** (Belarus) said that his country supported the activities of the Scientific Committee and hoped that they would continue to be based on a strict observance of the mandate as provided for by the relevant resolutions of the General Assembly, and to display objectivity and impartiality while taking the widest possible account of the opinions of all interested parties. His delegation had examined with great interest the report of the Scientific Committee and the scientific annex thereto and believed that it would make an important contribution to enhancing the understanding of the international community of the various effects of atomic radiation on mankind and the environment. Given the experience it had acquired following the Chernobyl disaster, Belarus was an important partner of the Scientific Committee. His delegation welcomed the programme of work which the Scientific Committee had submitted and, noting with appreciation that it intended to continue the studies on the radiological effects of the Chernobyl accident, pledged its cooperation.

9. His delegation had noted with great interest the observations made by the representative of Ukraine on the strengthening of the role of the Scientific Committee, particularly through an increase in its membership. It was important that the interests of States that had emerged during the 1990s should be taken into account in its work. In that connection, he called for a constructive exchange of opinions on the points raised by the representative of Ukraine.

10. **Mr. Mehta** (India) said that his delegation, which had actively participated in the activities of the Scientific Committee, was pleased once again to be a sponsor of the draft resolution. It welcomed the highly professional work of the Scientific Committee, and said that it was reassured by the conclusions of its 2001 report on the hereditary effects of radiation. It had never been demonstrated that radiation exposure caused hereditary effects in human beings. Advances in molecular genetics and the sequencing of the human genome would contribute to the improved understanding of structural and functional changes in the genes that underlay hereditary disease. Gains had also been made in the evaluation of the risk of multifactorial diseases such as coronary disease and diabetes. The Scientific Committee had used the double dose method for the calculation of risk, which had revealed that, for the population exposed to radiation in one generation only, the risk to progeny of the first post-radiation generation was estimated to be 3,000 to 4,700 cases per gray per one million. That constituted only 0.4 to 0.6 per cent of the baseline frequency of such disorders in the human population.

11. However, there were still several uncertainties in the estimations of risks owing to the lack of reliable data and the complexity of the biological systems. The increasing flow of new information on genomes should help to resolve some of the uncertainties and it was hoped that those new developments would be reflected in the Committee's future programme of work.

12. The proposed work programme indicated both the continuation of the earlier work on the health effects of the Chernobyl accident, as well as the intention to evaluate the data on radon in homes and mines, and to carry out epidemiological studies on diseases other than cancer. He welcomed the fact that the Scientific Committee had established close collaboration with scientists from the Member States most affected by the Chernobyl accident.

13. India continued to be interested in the effects of high-level natural background radiation on the human population and other living organisms and hoped that such studies would find their rightful place in the Scientific Committee's report.

14. **Mr. Shebani** (Libyan Arab Jamahiriya) said that nuclear pollution was a serious current problem, one to which his country paid great attention because of the danger it represented for present and future generations. One of the objectives of the international organizations was to achieve international cooperation

to eliminate the risk of radiation throughout the world. His country was deeply concerned about the increase in nuclear radiation from nuclear reactors, especially in the Middle East, and asked that all the necessary and mandatory safeguards should be taken and that no new nuclear reactors should be built in the region.

15. In spite of the many appeals from the international community to Israel to make the region a nuclear-free zone, Israel refused to allow IAEA to inspect its nuclear facilities. It also refused to provide any information about the radiation from its facilities, which posed a threat to the population of the region. Before some disaster occurred, the international community must therefore take steps to compel Israel to submit its nuclear facilities to IAEA inspections.

16. The Libyan Arab Jamahiriya hoped that regional and international efforts to use nuclear science for peaceful purposes would be stepped up for the benefit of humanity and that information would be exchanged among States concerning nuclear radiation, in order to protect against the risks involved.

17. Although there was a gleam of hope in the fact that some States had renounced nuclear testing and had taken steps to safeguard the transport and storage of nuclear waste, additional measures were needed to counter the threat.

18. The danger faced by humanity and the environment lay in the nuclear warheads which some States possessed; no new nuclear reactors must therefore be constructed, especially in the military field. All States must cooperate with a view to ending their nuclear research and testing. The Scientific Committee, which was to be congratulated on its most recent report, must continue to fulfil its mandate.

19. **Mr. Takahashi** (Japan) said that his Government attached great importance to the work of the Scientific Committee, which reviewed the exposure of the world's population to radiation from all sources. It particularly appreciated the comprehensive reports it prepared, which enabled the international scientific community and Governments to assess the effects of radiation on the population and the environment. His delegation supported the work of the Scientific Committee and valued the cooperative relationship which it maintained with the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), the World Health Organization (WHO), the International Labour Organization (ILO), the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), and the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD).

20. His delegation was a sponsor of the draft resolution now before the Committee because it was convinced that the work of the Scientific Committee in collecting, structuring and disseminating radiological information was of great importance in a world that was increasingly reliant on nuclear technology. It hoped that the draft resolution would be adopted by consensus.

21. It was the policy of the Japanese Government to promote the safe and peaceful uses of nuclear energy, through both bilateral and multilateral cooperation. As the only country to have suffered a nuclear attack, it was determined to use its wealth of experience in the peaceful uses of nuclear energy for the benefit of humanity. Such uses were not confined to the production of nuclear energy, but extended also to the application of radioisotopes for industrial, agricultural, medical and other purposes.

22. Early in 2001, Japan had established a Nuclear and Industrial Safety Agency, under the auspices of the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry, to oversee the safety regulation of all facilities and activities involving the use of nuclear power as a source of energy. The strengthening of the Nuclear Safety Commission had further improved the effectiveness of Japan's nuclear energy safety regulations.

23. Together with UNDP, Japan, which was concerned with the health of the population in the Semipalatinsk region of Kazakhstan, had convened the Tokyo International Conference for Assistance to the Semipalatinsk region, held in September 1999. As a follow-up to that Conference, and in cooperation with the Government of Kazakhstan, it had undertaken a survey to assess the effects of radiation on the health of the people of the Semipalatinsk region.

The meeting rose at 4 p.m.